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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YAOUNDE 000591

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TAGS: [CM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KCOR](#) [KDEM](#)
SUBJECT: (C) CAMEROON: PM AND CORRUPT MINDEF REMOVED IN
CABINET SHUFFLE, OTHERWISE SAME OLD, NEW OLD

REF: A. YAOUNDE 431
[1](#)B. YAOUNDE 370

Classified By: Poloff Heather Watson-Ayala for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) Summary. In a June 30 cabinet shuffle, President Biya appointed Philemon Yang, a senior official in the Presidency and former diplomat, to be his Prime Minister and dismissed Defense Minister Remy Ze Meka, whose grand-scale corruption made him persona non grata in the U.S. Otherwise, the shuffle was notable for what it was not--a bold move with new policy direction--as for what it was: a moderate revision of the cabinet in favor of Biya loyalists, likely in preparation for upcoming battles, including presidential elections slated for 2011 and Biya's own succession. Regional diversity was maintained, and the shuffle was accepted calmly. Para 6 details the changes. Post will transmit more robust analysis and full biographical data septel. End summary.

Headline: Ze Meka Dismissed
Byline: Status Quo Maintained

[1](#)2. (C) Political pundits, including senior government officials, had been speculating for more than 12 months about Biya's intentions to change his cabinet. President Biya had told the Ambassador that he intended to reduce the size of cabinet and clear out problematic ministers, especially Defense Minister Remy Ze Meka, whose corruption and mismanagement earned him the distinction of being the first sitting Minister of Defense to be found ineligible to enter the U.S. for acts of corruption. In the event, Biya actually added at least two ministerial portfolios to his cabinet, and made no changes in the economic and commercial ministries. Aside from Ze Meka's dismissal and the change of Prime Minister, the shuffle is noteworthy mainly because it largely maintained the status quo, and in fact reinforced Biya's team with time-worn loyalists. Regional diversity in the cabinet continued, and an additional slot added a female minister.

Out with the Old, In with the Old?

[1](#)3. (C) Many of the new cabinet members have already served as Ministers within Biya's government, so the cabinet includes many old faces. Many observers were surprised to learn Jean-Pierre Biyiti bi Essam, the former Minister of Communication alleged to have pocketed hundreds of thousands of dollars during the Pope's Cameroon visit in March, was not only maintained in government, but promoted to Minister of Post and Telecommunication, where he will control more resources. Issa Tchiroma Bakary, a one-time opposition leader who served as Transport Minister in the 1990s, was tapped to be the new Minister of Communication. Energy Minister Sindeu was likely replaced as a result of stalled progress on the government's development agenda. Martin

Belinga Eboutou, formerly Cameroon's Ambassador to the United Nations and a fierce defender of Biya's own Beti/Bulu ethnic group, was appointed Head of the Civil Cabinet.

Comment: Circling the Wagons?

14. (C) Ze Meka's removal augurs well for a host of USG objectives, especially for regional security and governance. Cameroonian elites nicknamed Ze Meka "Bad Boy" because of his brashness, and his corruption was more than simple robbery; Ze Meka's shenanigans were serious enough to undermine the nation's security, and Biya's decision to remove him could not have been taken lightly, not least because Ze Meka hails from Biya's own Bulu clan, which already feels under siege by the President's anti-corruption efforts. As relieved as we are to see Ze Meka depart, we are dismayed by Inoni's departure. Cognizant of allegations about Inoni's own corruption, we were nonetheless appreciative of his sincere and tireless efforts to tackle the Cameroonian bureaucracy and advocate a progressive political and economic agenda.

Comment (cont): Hope for Improved Cooperation on Security

15. (C) Biya's decision to replace Re Meka with Edgard Alain Mebe Ngo'o bodes well for our engagement with Cameroonian security forces, especially the Batallion D, Intervention Rapide (BIR). Mebe Ngo'o, who served as Chief of Biya's Civil Cabinet and more recently as the Chief of the National Police (DGSN), is also from the Bulu tribe, and he has a

YAOUNDE 00000591 002 OF 002

positive track record with the BIR, who were at dagger's drawn with Ze Meka, largely over the latter's corruption. As DGSN, Mebe Ngo'o worked closely with retired Israeli Colonel Avi Sivan, Biya's military advisor and the god-father of the BIR, so there is reason to believe they will collaborate to foster closer cooperation between the BIR and the regular Cameroonian Military. End comment.

16. (U) Following is a list of the changes announced on June 130.

Incoming Cabinet Appointees

Philemon Yang, Prime Minister, Head of Government

Bello Bouba Maigari, Minister of State, Minister of Transports

Edgar Alain Mebe Ngo'o, Minister Delegate at the Presidency, in charge of Defense

Jean-Pierre Biyiti bi Essam, Minister of Posts and Telecommunication

Jean-Baptiste Beleoken, Minister of Government Property and Land Tenure

Issa Tchiroma Bakary, Minister of Communication

Marie Therese Abena Ondoa nee Obama Marie-Therese, Minister of Women's Empowerment and the Family

Alim Youddouf nee Adidja Alim, Minister of Basic Education

Michael Ngako Tomdio, Minister of Water and Energy

Michel Zoa, Minister of Sports and Physical Training

Clementine Antoinette Ananga Messina nee Beyene, Minister Delegate to the Minister of Agriculture

Rene Sadi, Minister in Charge of Special Duties at the

Presidency

Mounouna Foutsou, Secretary of State to the Minister of
Secondary Education

Outgoing Cabinet Appointees

Chief Ephraim Inoni, Prime Minister, Head of Government

Gounoko Haounaye, Minister of State, Minister of Transports

Remy Ze Meka, Minister Delegate at the Presidency, in charge
of Defense

Bello Bouba Maigari, Minister of Posts and Telecommunication
(change of portfolio)

Pascal Anong Adibime, Minister of Government Property and
Land Tenure

Jean-Pierre Biyiti bi Essam, Minister of Communication
(change of portfolio)

Suzanne Mbomback, Minister of Women's Empowerment and the
Family

Haman Adama, Minister of Basic Education

Jean Bernard Sindou, Minister of Water and Energy

Augustin Edjao, Minister of Sports and Physical Training

Philemon Yang, Minister, Assistant Secretary General to the
Presidency (change of portfolio)

Catherine Abena, Secretary of State to the Minister of
Secondary Education
GARVEY